



Choosing a Postsecondary School

Adapted from Preparing Your Child For College, a publication of the US Department of Education

Postsecondary schools are located in large cities, in suburbs, and in small towns throughout the country. Some are public institutions and some are private. Some enroll thousands of students, others have just a few hundred. Some have diverse student populations, and some focus attention on specific types of students. The type of institution best suited to you will depend on your needs and preferences. You can start your investigation by considering these basic questions:

- Why do I want to attend a postsecondary school?
- What do I hope to achieve?
- Do I have a specific major in mind?
- Do I prefer a small or a very large school?

Once you have an idea of your needs and preferences, continue your information gathering. Many of the following questions can be answered by accessing web pages for schools that appear to meet your initial criteria.

What kinds of educational programs are offered?

Ask about their best-known or “specialty” programs, types of certifications or degrees available.

How long does it take to earn a certificate or degree?

Find this out before enrolling in any program. Make sure you know if the timeframe means full-time or part-time attendance.

What graduate follow-up information is available?

Get job placement rates for graduates by program. If lots of graduates are working in an area unrelated to their major, that’s a problem.

Are career and placement services available to students?

If you’re looking to transfer from a 2-year college to a 4-year school, ask how this can be accomplished. Ask how many graduates transfer each year.

Will the credits transfer to other schools? Find out if they transfer straight across, if in-state or out-of-state transfers make a difference.

What is the dropout rate at the school?

A high dropout rate may indicate student dissatisfaction. Ask about refund policies if you drop out or drop a class.

What are the admissions requirements?

Make sure you have completed any high school prerequisites and admissions tests.

What is the loan default rate?

A high default rate suggests that either students are not completing their training, or are unable to find jobs when they graduate.

What do recent graduates have to say about their experience at the school?

Schools should give you the opportunity to talk to recent graduates—or perhaps current students—who can share their opinions about classes, teachers, facilities, and about the skills they have acquired.

What facilities are available at the school?

Consider the quality of the classrooms, libraries, and computer centers. If you plan to live on campus, visit the dorms to see living conditions and meal arrangements.

How is the school accredited?

Federal financial aid will only be available to students attending schools that are recognized by the Secretary of Education.

To check the status of a potential school, you can call the Student Financial Aid Information Center at 1-800-4FED-AID.

Many of these questions can be answered by visiting the Utah Futures web site. You can get admissions information, find out what programs are offered, link directly to schools’ web sites and more at <http://www.utahfutures.org>. ©